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## COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

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For Immediate Release

October 3, 2002

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### **DMME, MSHA to Conduct Joint *Winter Alert!* Campaign in October – November**

- State and federal mine safety agencies coordinating outreach efforts, safety message to Virginia coal mine operators and employees -

**Big Stone Gap, VA** – The Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) and the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) are teaming-up to visit each Virginia coal mine and meet with all shifts and work crews during October and November to review Winter Alert mine safety precautions. The state and federal mine safety inspection agencies have developed a checklist and process to ensure that coal mine operators and employees receive a comprehensive and consistent safety message specific to their individual mine's conditions.

“Our agency has worked with MSHA to maximize the effectiveness of our annual Winter Alert safety talks by splitting the workload and the number of mines to be visited,” said DMME Division of Mines Chief Frank Linkous. “We have also collaborated to develop resource materials and safety talks for both underground and surface coal mines that will address the hazardous conditions common to the Winter Alert period.”

The Winter Alert period, which runs from October through March, can dramatically change conditions at underground and surface coal mines. Cold dry air, freezing and thawing conditions and barometric pressure changes increase hazards for coal miners ranging from increased methane gas liberation, roof falls and explosive conditions in underground mines to unstable highwalls, iced-over steps on equipment and elevated walkways, and slippery road conditions on surface mines.

While safety talks and handouts will focus on the most common hazards of the Winter Alert period, they will also review each mine's compliance and accident histories and any existing special conditions that would warrant extra vigilance on the part of mine operators and employees. Roof control, ventilation and mine emergency plans, methane liberation history, dust control and mining near abandoned mine workings will be reviewed and discussed at underground mines. Mobile equipment and roadway maintenance, working near overhead electrical lines and mining near gas pipelines will be emphasized during surface mine safety talks.

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